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May 7, 2003

Michael K. Powell, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Mr. Powell:

Since autumn 2002, I've been participating in the CapTel Technology Research Trial to evaluate new telephone technology for deaf and hard of hearing consumers. This technology uses a voice-recognition computer software program. If you were calling me, you'd still go through a relay center but instead of someone physically typing what you say on a TTY for me, someone *repeats* everything you say into a computer voice-activated software program that automatically types what you say to me. The *speed difference is significant* between someone physically typing the information and someone speaking the information for instant captions.

I've been hard of hearing for 40+ years and my hearing has started to decline more as I enter my late 40s. I've needed extra help with telephone communication. I've tried the traditional TTY/Voice Relay service and it doesn't work for my needs. But, let me tell you about my experience as a research participant in the CapTel trial!

Ultratec, Inc is conducting the CapTel research trial with cooperation from the MD TTY/Voice Relay Center in Baltimore, MD. Because of this special research, I've been able to participate in multi-party business conference calls. Some of the participants in these conference calls use cell phones which makes their conversation contribution less clear to me. Other callers are females who speak at sound frequencies and decibel levels that are challenging for me to hear. Thanks to CapTel, I'm able to hear (albeit, read) what's being said on the conference calls. These business conference calls are very important to me because I'm learning about a business that will lead me to gainful income. Although I have not been actively seeking traditional employment during this CapTel research period, I could see how the CapTel service would make telephone interactions with potential employers nearly seamless. The traditional and established TTY/V Relay Service is not a good fit for my needs. The Voice Over Communication isn't a comfortable fit for me. The CapTel service is faster and near seamless because of voice activated computer technology speed. This CapTel technology/service is compatible with my disability accommodation needs.

Now, I understand Ultratec is also working on a caption cell phone for deaf and hard of hearing people. I'm so excited about this potential! I want to be a participant in this research trial too! Two weeks ago I had my first appointment with a new doctor at a new location. Despite giving myself an extra 15 minutes to find the building, I got lost! Then I had a tough time finding a public telephone to make a call to ask for clearer directions. (These public telephones are being removed because of the increasing usage and reliance of the public on their own cell phones.) I eventually found a Safeway grocery store and asked an employee if she would make a call for me because I am very hard of hearing. This is how I have to deal with telephoning in public in the year of 2003; I depend on good Samaritans when I can find them. Now, if I had a captioned cell phone to use, I wouldn't have been 20 minutes late.

The same life situations that happen to able-bodied people also happen to hard of hearing people. The lack of cell phone access when out and about can leave the impression that we're irresponsible if we don't call ahead to alert that we're running late because of traffic or if we can't call from the road to get clearer directions. Last fall, I got stuck on the beltway for an hour during non-rush hour and was late for my medical appointment at NIH. I couldn't call to warn them about the delay. I worry about having car trouble at an inconvenient time or location. A caption accessible cell phone would ease these concerns and level the playing field for me.

Ultratec recently sponsored a "feedback" meeting with research participants. The ideas and suggestions we were able to make based on testing and using the technology were quite helpful. We all wanted to praise how good this CapTel technology has been in easing our telephone communication. The research folks were appreciative but they wanted to hear about the glitches and other difficulties in our phone experiences. I wish you could have heard the praise expressed to Ultratec by the participants.

In summary, I hope the FCC (and others) continues to fund this critical disability-related research and incorporates this phone technology with existing accessible services. Funding is needed to test improvements made (or to be made) in the current voice activated technology. We need funding for advances such as caption cell phones. *I need more telephone options* than what is currently available. We, as a county, have made enormous, prideful and powerful strides in the disability field yet we have a ways to go. Despite ADA and other protective and progressive government laws, discrimination is alive and well. Give us more tools and options to help level the economic and social playing field.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Rogovsky

CC: Representative Van Hollen
Delegate Niemann